United Nations

Daily Highlights

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FRIDAY HIGHLIGHTS

- Secretary-General and UNESCO Director-General appeal to all parties in Yugoslavia to respect 1954 Hague Convention for Protection of Cultural Property in Event of Armed Conflict.

- Political and Security Committee hears call from representative of Belarus to establish nuclear-weapon-free zone in his region; nuclear-weapon-free zone in Middle East also discussed.

- Representative of Colombia tells Social Committee that Secretary-General's report on world social situation fails to give balanced global coverage.

- Speakers in Legal Committee cite burning of Kuwaiti oil wells by Iraqi forces and crude oil spills as violations of environmental and humanitarian law.

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Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar and the Director-General of United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Federico Mayor, have appealed to all the parties in Yugoslavia to end the conflict and to negotiate a peaceful settlement of their differences.

In a joint declaration, issued simultaneously in New York and Paris, they said they were "deeply concerned" by news of the worsening situation in Yugoslavia, particularly by reports indicating that the old city of Dubrovnik might have been damaged by shelling. They appealed to all parties to respect the principles enshrined in the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and the 1972 World Heritage Convention. Dubrovnik is inscribed on the World Heritage list.

The declaration said that UNESCO was preparing to send a high-level representative to Yugoslavia to consult on all questions relating to the protection of the country's cultural and natural heritage and called on all parties involved to comply with the Conventions.

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The representative of Belarus this morning called for the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in his region, as the General Assembly's First Committee (Political and Security) continued its debate on disarmament issues. He said the zone should encompass Belarus, the Ukraine, the three Baltic States and any other neighbouring States wishing to be part of it.

Earlier this week, the representatives of Qatar and Egypt had expressed support for the Secretary-General's proposal for the creation of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East. Referring to several Egyptian initiatives on the subject, the representative of Egypt said Israel's refusal to adhere to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards had fueled suspicion in the region regarding its nuclear programme as well as its motivations.

Meanwhile, Israel has stated, in an addendum to the Secretary-General's report to the Assembly on a nuclear-weapons-free zone in the Middle East, dated 22 October, that pressure to put its nuclear installations under IAEA inspection ignored Israel's special security concerns, which were illustrated by the Gulf war, and Iraq's SCUD missile attacks. Before such a zone could be established, Israel said, the Arab States needed to publicly recognize and accept the State of Israel as an integral part of the region, and renounce the anti-Israeli boycott. Without such assurances, it would not consider putting its nuclear programme under international scrutiny.

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The Secretary-General's interim report on the world social situation has been criticized by Colombia for giving wider coverage to certain countries and regions, particularly those undergoing the transition from a centrally planned to a market economy, than to others.

Addressing the General Assembly's Fourth Committee (Social, Humanitarian and Cultural), yesterday, the representative of Colombia, Ana Mercedes Botero, said the social situation of all countries and regions of the world should receive equal coverage in the upcoming 1993 report.

Other speakers in the Social Committee stressed the need for measures to halt the negative effects of structural adjustment policies, which they said, had worsened conditions for the poorest sectors of developing countries.

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The General Assembly's Sixth Committee (Legal) has ended its debate on new laws to protect the environment in time of war with many speakers voicing disagreement on whether new legal regimes were needed. The Committee has been considering an item which states that the 1977 United Nations Convention on the Prohibition of Military or Any Other Hostile Use of Environmental Modification Techniques is "painfully inadequate".

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Many delegations cited violations of environmental and humanitarian law, in particular the burning of Kuwaiti oil wells by Iraqi forces during the Gulf crisis.

The representative of Iraq, Safa S. Ahmed, said the international community had ignored the environmental damage suffered by his country as a result of allied bombing. Such damage, he said, included the destruction of water and sewerage treatment systems, oil facilities, and power-generating plants.

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